

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE **4-B**WASHINGTON TIMES
27 May 1987

World

Knesset study finds Peres most to blame in Pollard affair

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

JERUSALEM — A parliamentary committee last night blamed Foreign Minister Shimon Peres more than other leaders for the Pollard spy scandal that strained Israel's relationship with the United States.

The Intelligence Subcommittee of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, accepted "beyond question" the government's contention that it did not know of the recruitment of Jonathan and Anne Henderson-Pollard.

But it said the affair was not purely a "rogue operation" and that those who had activated the Pollards were government employees acting with government approval.

The subcommittee's report says Mr. Peres, as "first among equals" in the government at the time the Pollards were apprehended, must bear the main responsibility.

It also says Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin bears direct ministerial responsibility because he did not see to it that proper supervision was exercised over the Scientific Liaison Bureau — Lekem — that operated the Pollards.

Commenting on the report, Mr. Rabin said the subcommittee was a "political body" and that its findings were "not relevant." But the subcommittee is equally divided between the Labor Party of Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres and the Likud Party. Its chairman, Abba Eban, is himself a member of Labor.

Mr. Peres, for his part, said he was prepared to accept responsibility for

anything that was done in the 25 months that he was prime minister.

Earlier in the day, a separate judicial commission issued a report saying the government as a whole must take responsibility for the affair. This report, issued by a two-man judicial body named by the government before the parliamentary investigation was started, is the one likely to be adopted by the cabinet.

"The mountain was really a molehill, and the earth did not move," Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said in commenting on both reports.

Pollard, 32, an American Jew, was sentenced in Washington to life in prison last March for selling hundreds of classified U.S. military documents to Israel in 1984 and 1985 while employed as a civilian U.S.

Navy analyst. His wife, Anne, was sentenced to five years.

Pollard said the "highest echelons" of the Israeli government were aware of his spy activities. Israeli leaders denied it.

In a separate section of the parliamentary report, the three Likud members of the subcommittee said Mr. Peres had given "misleading" testimony. The Labor members said Mr. Peres had testified "in innocence," without knowing the full facts.

The subcommittee as a whole also criticized Prime Minister Shamir, of the Likud, noting that he was a member of the government and of the Inner Cabinet throughout the affair.

The subcommittee scored Moshe Arens, who was defense minister when the Pollards were recruited;

Rafi Eitan, former head of Lekem; Israeli Air Force Lt. Col. Aviem Sela, who was the Pollards' handler in Washington; and Menachem Meron, then director-general of the Defense Ministry.

Lt. Col. Sela, the subcommittee's report says, showed "a lack of judgment" in the affair and was "not accurate" in his testimony before the group.

About 12 hours before the subcommittee's report was submitted, mission consisting of veteran attorney Yehosuhua Rotenstreich and former Israeli Army Chief of Staff Zvi Tzur was given to the government.

That report is less critical of Israel's leadership. Commentators said its submission in advance of the Eban report was not coincidental.

It says Mr. Arens and Mr. Rabin were equally responsible for the lack of supervision of the Pollard operation but that neither knew of the espionage, Israel radio reported.

The two-man commission concluded that "the entire government is obliged to accept responsibility for all of the mistakes."

It said Mr. Eitan acted "too independently" as head of Lekem. It criticized Mr. Eitan's subsequent appointment as chairman of the board of the Israel Chemicals Corp., saying it was "insensitive, to say the least." That appointment was made by Minister Ariel Sharon of the Likud.

Both of the reports contain classified sections. The secret section of the Rotenstreich-Tzur report takes up 45 pages.